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Bursting the self-esteem bubble - Hubris - Brief Article

[Psychology Today](#), [March-April, 2002](#) by [David Dent](#)

PEOPLE WITH HIGH SELF-ESTEEM may be more of a threat to society than those with a lower sense of self-worth, according to a controversial 100-page report. Nicholas Emler, Ph.D., a social psychologist at the London School of Economics, found that people with high self-esteem are more likely to be racist, violent and criminal. Low self-esteem increases the risk of eating disorders, suicide and depression, but it is not a factor in delinquency or substance abuse, according to Emler. The study was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the United Kingdom's largest think tank, and is distributed by York Publishing Services.

Emler reviewed seminal research on self-esteem as well as hundreds of study abstracts before concluding that genes are more important than parenting or environment and low self-esteem is not a risk factor for poor academic performance. Black teenagers voiced higher self-esteem than whites, a difference Emler attributes in part to presentation.

"Black teens are willing to say things about themselves that others may not feel comfortable saying," maintains Emler, who also found that people with high self-esteem may have an unrealistic sense of themselves. "They expect to do well at things, discount failure and feel beyond reproach."

High self-esteem seems most dangerous when it colors racial and ethnic tolerance. "People with incredibly positive views of themselves feel anybody who differs from them is an insult," explains Emler. "They just don't like people who are different."

These pitfalls have yet to curb the booming self-help industry. More than 3,000 book titles on the Barnes & Noble Web site contain the term "self-esteem."

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